DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 321 RC 013 593

AUTHOR Lyson, Thomas A.; Stover, Penny W.
TITLE From High School to Adulthood: A Survey of South Carolina Young People.
INSTITUTION South Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station, Clemson.
REPORT NO SC-AE-641
PUB DATE Jul 82
NOTE 17p.; For related document, see ED 107 40t.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aspiration; *Attitude Change; Blacks; Educational Attainment; Expectation; Family Characteristics; Females; *Influences; Longitudinal Studies; Males; Marital Status; Migration Patterns; Military Service; Occupational Aspiration; Place of Residence; Rural Areas; Socioeconomic Status; Whites; *Work Life Expectancy; *Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *South Carolina

ABSTRACT

The bulletin presents an overview of what has been learned to date about the various paths 170 South Carolina young adults have taken since they were originally interviewed in 1967, their sophomore year in high school, then again in 1969 and 1979. Data, organized and presented by four race and sex categories, cover: white males (N=62), black males (N=30), white females (N=45), and black females (N=33). Descriptive information about their social and economic backgrounds is presented in the first section. Part 2 shows patterns of stability and change in the formation and attainment of educational and occupational goals. In addition, residential preferences and patterns of migration, as well as marital timing and family formation, are discussed. The third section examines how panel members responded to two important questions in the 1979 survey. The first question asked about major events that shaped their lives since leaving high school in 1969. The second, solicited comments on the one thing they wanted most to accomplish in the next 10 years. The final section summarizes the results and discusses their implications for helping future generations of South Carolina young people make the transition to adulthood. (AH)

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From High School To Adulthood
A Survey Of
South Carolina Young People

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From High School to Adulthood: A Survey Of South Carolina Young People

Thomas A. Lyson and Penny W. Stover*

The experiences and problems faced by young people after they leave school are of great interest to parents, teachers, high school counselors, educational administrators, and others concerned with the welfare and well-being of young adults. Answers to questions such as how many people leave their community and state after graduation, how many go to college, what occupations they enter, and when they get married form the basis for effective educational programs and social policies to assist young people in making the transition to meaningful and fulfilling adult roles.

An accumulating body of research dealing with the career plans and attainments of American young people who graduated from high school in the 1960s and 1970s is providing answers to many of the above questions. Both large scale, national surveys (3), as well as state- and county-based studies (1, 4, 6), have examined the effect of social background conditions, demographic characteristics, and personal values on the formation and attainment of life goals. Another group of studies (2, 5, 7) has focused on how occupational and educational plans change after a young person leaves high school. Taken together, previous research, along with work now in progress, is providing a clearer picture of what happens to American young people in the years after they leave high school.

To learn how high school students in South Carolina plan for adult life and what happens to them after they leave school, rural sociologists at Clemson University have studied a panel of individuals who grew up in rural areas, small towns, and cities in the state and who graduated from high school in 1969. The panel members were first interviewed in 1967 when they were sophomores in high school. Additional contacts were made in 1969 during their senior year, in 1972 three years after high school, and in 1979 12 years after they were first interviewed.

Baseline information about educational, occupational, marital, and residential plans, as well as data on family background and personal characteristics, was gathered in 1967 and 1969. The third and fourth contacts in 1972 and 1979 also solicited information about career plans, but, in addition, began collecting data about migration, educational attainment, occupational achievement, marital status, and family formation.

This bulletin presents an overview of what has been learned to date about the various paths young adults who were reared in South Carolina in the 1950s and 1960s have traveled since leaving high school. The report is organized into four parts. We begin by looking at the social origins of the panel members. Using data collected during their sophomore year in high school, descriptive information about their social and

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economic backgrounds is presented. In the second part, patterns of stability and change in the formation and attainment of educational and occupational goals are examined. In addition, residential preferences and patterns of migration, as well as marital timing and family formation, are discussed. The third section examines how panel members responded to two important questions in the 1979 survey. The first question asked about the major events that shaped their lives since leaving high school in 1969. The second question solicited comments on the one thing they wanted most to accomplish in the next 10 years. The final section summarizes the results and discusses their implications for helping future generations of South Carolina young people make the transition to adulthood.

A Note on Data Collection

The results presented in this report are one part of a larger study of young adults who grew up in rural areas of the South. In addition to South Carolina respondents, young people in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia also participated in this study.* For present purposes, only information from the South Carolina sample is presented. South Carolina panel members were selected by a stratified, random-sampling procedure based on the size of school and racial composition in 1967. A total of 202 individuals from 24 counties throughout the state were interviewed in 1967. Because of problems relocating some of the panel members, deaths, and refusals to continue participating in the study between 1967 and 1979, the panel size has been reduced to 170 people. To increase the usefulness and generalizability of the findings, data are organized and presented by the following four race and sex categories: white males (N = 62), black males (N = 30), white females (N = 45), and black females (N = 33).

Part I. Social Background Characteristics

The empirical analysis begins with some brief observations about the social origins and background characteristics of the panel members. Table 1 reveals, for example, that the whites in our study came from more urban origins than blacks. Almost 63 percent of the white males and over 70 percent of the white females were reared in the towns and cities of the state compared to less than half of the black females and one-third of the black males.

Table 1 also indicates that the whites, in general, came from better educated and more economically affluent families. For instance, over 70 percent of the blacks came from homes where their fathers had less than a high school education. On the other hand, less than half of the white males and the white females came from homes where the father had completed less than 12 years of school. Similar patterns also hold for mother's education.

Along this line, it is worth noting that about 40 percent of the white

* Readers interested in a more detailed description of the larger study and a summary of results should obtain a copy of "Southern Youth Study: 1966 to 1979" by Frank M. Howell and Wolfgang Frese, Department of Sociology and Rural Life, Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, MSU, Mississippi State, MS 39762.

men and over 50 percent of the white women in our study came from families where the main breadwinner held a white collar job. Only 25 percent of the black males and about 7 percent of the black females, however, came from families with a white collar breadwinner. The lower social origins of the blacks in our study is also evident in the socioeconomic prestige level of the main breadwinner. Overall, blacks came from homes where the occupational prestige of the family head was considerably lower than the occupational prestige of the breadwinner in white families.

Taken together, the data in Table 1 are presented not to make invidious comparisons between the races, but as a benchmark against which the attainments and achievements of the four groups can be evaluated. We turn now to an examination of the career development and decision-making processes that have shaped the lives of our panel members.

Table 1: Social background characteristics of the study population by race and sex

Characteristics	White men	White women	Black men	Black women
Childhood residence				
Urban (%)	62.9	70.5	33.3	48.5
Rural (%)	37.1	29.5	66.7	51.5
Father's education				
Less than H.S. (%)	40.1	47.5	72.8	70.3
H.S. graduate (%)	26.7	30.0	9.1	18.5
More than H.S. (%)	33.2	22.5	18.1	11.2
Mother's education				
Less than H.S. (%)	33.4	34.9	48.2	70.9
H.S. graduate (%)	31.7	34.9	14.8	6.5
More than H.S. (%)	34.9	30.2	37.0	22.6
Breadwinner's occupation				
Farmer/farm worker (%)	3.2	2.4	21.4	16.6
Blue collar (%)	57.3	45.2	53.6	76.6
White collar (%)	39.5	52.4	25.0	6.8
Breadwinner's occupational prestige*	39.3	48.1	27.5	17.8

* This is the Duncan Socio-Economic Index of occupational prestige. Scores range from 1 to 96. See A.J. Reiss, *Occupations and Social Status*, New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961, for a detailed description of this index.

Part 2: Career Plans and Achievements

The Process of Educational Attainment

One of the first and oftentimes most critical career decisions facing high school students deals with their plans for additional education after they graduate. When panel members were contacted as high school sophomores (Table 2), considerably more black men expected to obtain a college degree than the other three race/sex groups. However, by the time they had become seniors, white men had surpassed the other groups in the percentage expecting a college degree. Interestingly, both white women and black women lagged well behind their male counterparts in 1969. No doubt the military draft and the automatic deferment given to college students contributed to these sex differences. Also, traditional sex role attitudes prevalent in the 1960s served to dampen the educational ambitions of many American women.

Table 2: Percentage expecting to earn a college degree at three points in time compared to percentage having obtained a college degree by 1979, by race and sex

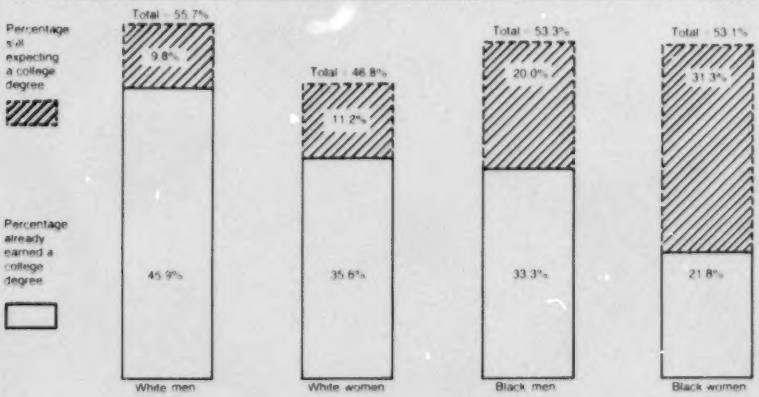
	Expect a college degree			Obtained college degree
	1967	1969	1972	1979
	Percentages			
White men	27.9	54.8	50.8	45.9
White women	20.0	31.1	33.3	35.6
Black men	53.3	46.4	40.0	33.3
Black women	31.3	24.2	42.4	21.8

In 1972, three years after completing high school, over half the white men still expected to graduate from college and 40 percent of the black men held similar expectations. The black women in our study, however, showed a dramatic increase in their educational expectations. Over 42 percent expected to complete college. On the other hand, only about one-third of the white women expected to obtain at least a bachelor's degree.

Given the relatively high expectations of black women in 1972, it was a bit surprising to find that in 1979 fewer of them had actually earned a degree than of the other groups. Only 22 percent (half the expected percentage from 1972) had finished college. For the other three race/sex groups, the level of educational expectations in 1972 more closely matched their 1979 attainment. Both black and white men experienced slightly less achievement than they expected, while white women had achieved somewhat higher levels of attainment than they had expected.

Because career planning is a constant process of formulating and reformulating expectations (e.g., a person who sees little need for a college degree soon after he/she leaves high school may quickly discover the value of a college education after a few years in the labor force), panel members were asked in 1979 about their plans for obtaining additional education. Figure 1 combines the percentage of the

Figure 1: Percentage having obtained a college degree by 1979 and percentage expecting to obtain a college degree in the future, by race and sex



panel who had already graduated from college with the percentage who still expected to do so. The combined percentage (expectations added to attainment) provides some idea of the potential educational attainment for each group. While there is little difference in the height of the bars in Figure 1, it is interesting to note that most whites who expected to complete 4 years of college had generally done so by 1979. In fact, only an additional 10 percent expected to earn a college degree. However, 10 years after leaving high school, blacks, for whatever reasons, had not been able to realize their educational expectations. In 1979 one out of five black men and one out of three black women still expected to earn a college degree.

Taken together, the patterns of educational expectations and attainments clearly suggest that white respondents have been able to attain their educational goals more rapidly than blacks. By 1979 most white men and women who wanted to obtain college degrees had done so. On the other hand, blacks had not attained levels of education equal to whites. No doubt their lower social origins, along with patterns of educational segregation, and racial discrimination have made it more difficult for blacks to achieve their educational goals. Nevertheless, the blacks in our study still anticipate completing college. If our panel members are able to achieve their educational expectations, there will be very little difference among the four groups.

Occupational Ambition: From Plans to Attainment

Educational attainment, or lack of it, has been shown in numerous studies to be highly correlated with occupational achievement. Certain levels of education are often required in preparation for entry into high status occupations. From the previous discussion of educational attainment, we might expect to find many members of our study population aiming for, and attaining, rather high status jobs.

To examine how young people go about selecting an occupation, panel members were asked what type of job they expected to hold most of their lives. Responses to this question were coded into an index of socioeconomic prestige with scores ranging from 1 to 96 (see footnote on Table 1). Generally speaking, Table 3 indicates that, since leaving high school, the white respondents have held higher occupational expectations and attained more prestigeful jobs than their black counterparts. During their early high school years, however, there were only small differences in the levels of occupational expectation among the four race/sex groups. But, by the time they became high school seniors,

Table 3: Average Duncan Socio-Economic Index prestige rankings of expected occupation in 1967, 1969, 1972, and 1979 and attained occupation in 1979, by race and sex

	Expected occupational attainment				Actual occupational attainment
	1967	1969	1972	1979	1979
	Prestige Index				
White men	47.4	56.6	51.2	48.6	52.7
White women	54.3	49.2	58.3	50.6	49.3
Black men	52.8	37.7	44.6	42.8	33.5
Black women	48.4	44.6	46.7	46.3	43.3

whites held higher occupational expectations. These patterns of differences in occupational expectations between blacks and whites maintained themselves through 1979.

In 1979, whites held jobs that were more prestigeful than blacks. Especially noteworthy is the low prestige level of the jobs occupied by black men in 1979. The average prestige ranking of 33.5 for black men is almost 20 points lower than that for whites and is 10 points lower than black women. Clearly, black men, more than any other group, have had a difficult time achieving high status jobs. It should be noted, however, that although black men currently hold relatively low status jobs, they expect to move into more prestigeful positions in the future.

Taken as a whole, the findings in Table 3 suggest that blacks in general, and black men in particular, have perceived and confronted a more restrictive occupational opportunity structure than whites. Nevertheless, when their most recent occupational expectations are cast against their social origins (Table 1), it is clear that the blacks in our study anticipate substantial upward social mobility.

Residential Preferences and Patterns of Migration

Occupational opportunities are influenced, to some extent at least, by the type of community in which a person resides. An examination of people who want to live in small towns and rural areas versus those who expect to live in more urban environs gives some clue regarding the career opportunities and life chances that will confront various members of our study population.

While more whites than blacks expressed rural preferences during their sophomore year in high school, by the time our panel members reached their senior year residential preferences were remarkably similar across race/sex groups (Table 4). At the time of high school graduation, about 45 percent of the respondents planned to live in rural areas. Three years after high school, at a time when most young people have either been in the work force for a few years or, if they went to college, will soon be in the work force, over half of our sample expected to live in rural areas.

By 1979, fewer respondents, regardless of race or sex, were living in rural areas than had expected to live there. We suspect that the more restricted opportunity structure in most rural areas forced many individuals to reconsider their residential plans. Nevertheless, about 40 percent of the whites were residing in small towns or rural places in 1979,

Table 4: Percentage expecting to live in rural areas in 1967, 1969, 1972, and 1979 and percentage actually residing in rural areas in 1979, by race and sex

	Expect to live in a rural area				Actually live in a rural area
	1967	1969	1972	1979	1979
	Percentages				
White men	47.3	46.8	53.4	40.0	41.9
White women	54.3	46.7	53.1	40.0	35.6
Black men	30.0	46.7	56.7	53.3	36.7
Black women	40.0	43.3	53.1	33.3	21.2

and 40 percent expected to live in these environs in the future. A similar percentage of blacks were living in rural areas in 1979, but unlike the whites in our study, over half of the black men still planned rural residences in the future. Black women experienced the most dramatic change in residential preferences. While most black women were oriented toward rural residences through 1972, only about one in five were living in rural areas in 1979. Further, only one-third of the black women we surveyed expected to live in a rural area in the future. Compared to the other race/sex groups, black women clearly favor more urban environs.

Related to residential preferences are patterns of migration. Of particular concern here are the number and percentage of young people who grew up in South Carolina in the 1950s and 1960s and have chosen to settle down in their home community, to move elsewhere in the state, or to leave South Carolina. Table 5 indicates that more blacks left the state than whites. Over 35 percent of the black women and 40 percent of the black men are residing in other states. Interestingly, of the blacks who remained in South Carolina, most live in their home county. Whites, on the other hand, are more likely to have moved to other residences in the state. Especially noteworthy is the fact that almost one-fourth of the black out-of-state migrants have moved to non-Southern states. We suspect that many blacks in our sample may have followed migration patterns established in the 1950s and 1960s and moved to major urban centers on the east coast of the United States.

Table 5: Patterns of migration between 1967 and 1979, by race and sex

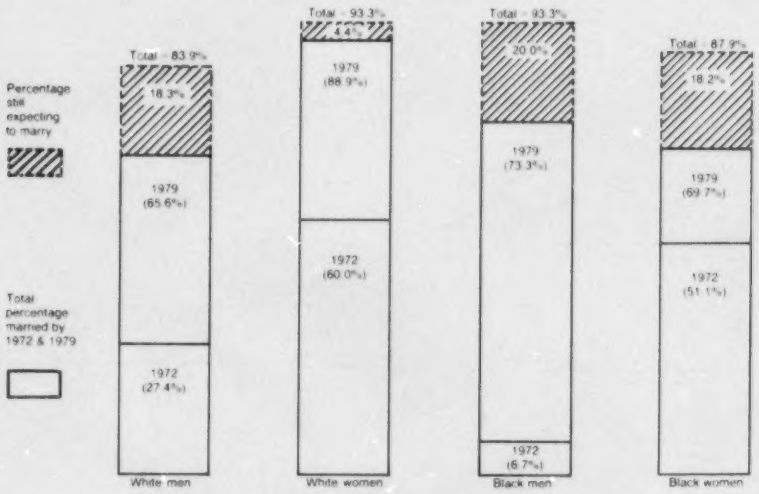
Residence in 1979 compared to residence in 1967	White men %	White women %	Black men %	Black women %
Same county as 1967	59.7	55.6	60.0	48.5
Another county, but within South Carolina	17.7	35.6	0.0	15.2
Another southern state	11.3	4.4	16.7	12.1
Outside the South	11.3	4.4	23.3	24.2

Marital Plans and Family Formation

Besides educational preparation, occupational selection, residential preferences, and patterns of migration, marriage and family decisions figure prominently in the lives of most young people. A decision to marry, in fact, is probably one of the major personal decisions made by young adults today.

Women in our sample, regardless of race, tended to marry much earlier than men (see Figure 2). Within the 3 years following high school (1972), more than half the women had married. On the other hand, relatively few of the men we studied had married by 1972 — only about a quarter of the white men and less than one tenth of the black men. Besides the possibility that men delayed marriage in order to pursue educational goals, most were also eligible for military service immediately following high school. Therefore, they may have been forced to postpone both education and marriage to fulfill their military obligation.

Figure 2: Percentage having married by 1972 and 1979 and percentage expecting to marry in the future, by race and sex



The period from 1972 to 1979, however, saw a significant increase in marriages for men. The percentages of married white men more than doubled, while the percentage of black men who married rose from 6 percent to more than 73 percent. Some factors affecting this rapid escalation might include completion of military service, completion of formal education, and securing a steady job that could provide a stable income to support a family.

Although at the time of our last contact the majority of each of the race/sex groups had married, a sizeable number had not. Those who had not married were asked about their future expectations concerning marital plans. By adding those already married to respondents who expressed plans to marry at some future date, almost all (93%) of the white women and black men would eventually be married. Slightly fewer black women (88%) and white men (84%) forsaw marriage as a part of their life.

For married young people, the decision to have children might be a major factor affecting their ability to reach career goals. The necessity of providing and caring for children, for women especially, often results in a decision to delay pursuing a career. Table 6 shows that the whites in our study were more likely to have decided not to have children. Of respondents who have or expect to have children, black men want the

Table 6: Average number of children and fertility plans by race and sex

	White men	White women	Black men	Black women
Average number of children in 1979	0.7	1.5	1.5	1.2
Total number of children desired	1.7	2.0	2.8	2.1
Percentage of respondents who do not expect to have any children	9.7%	13.3%	3.3%	6.1%

largest families. Even though they generally married later than women, by 1979 black men had on the average as many children as the longer married women. The average number of children black men expected to have was almost three. In contrast, black women, like white women, expect to have only two children. Interestingly, white men had the least number of children in 1979 and they also expected to have smaller families than respondents in the other race/sex groups. Even though they have been out of high school for at least 10 years, white men on the average had less than one child. Overall, white men in our study expect to have less than two children.

In sum, we found that within the 10 years since graduating from high school, white women have nearly completed their families. This is not surprising considering that many had married immediately following high school. Similarly, black women, who also married early, have borne more than half of their anticipated children. Even black men, who delayed marriage longer and expect larger families than women, have more than half of the total number of children they expect. White men, on the other hand, have the least number of children and expect to have the fewest. Presently, their families are less than half completed.

Part 3: The Past and the Future

Critical Events That Shaped the Lives of the High School Class of 1969

While it is a relatively easy task to chart the expectations and attainments of the members of our study, the data presented in the preceding figures and tables do not adequately convey the social and psychological factors that have shaped their lives. In an effort to better understand the factors and conditions that influence critical career decisions, panel members were asked for their thoughts on the following question: "Since leaving high school, what were the most important events that have shaped your life?" As might be expected, responses to this question were many and varied, but four events seemed to predominate, regardless of race or sex. Marriage, having children, obtaining a college education, and getting a job were the events considered most significant by each group of respondents. Not surprisingly, many men also listed military service as a major life event (see Table 7).

The most significant events for black and white women have been family-oriented occurrences — specifically, getting married and having children. This no doubt reflects the manner in which women in the

Table 7: Most important life events since leaving high school, by race and sex

Event*	White men %	White women %	Black men %	Black women %
Marriage	51.6	62.2	13.3	33.3
Having children	29.0	53.3	13.3	39.4
Obtaining a college education	27.4	24.4	16.7	18.2
Getting a job	17.7	15.6	23.3	12.1
Military service	21.0	0.0	23.3	0.0

* Many respondents listed more than one event, while some listed none, consequently percentages will not sum to 100%.

1960s had been socialized to value family-oriented ideals. A combination of family and educational events were responses most often given by white men. Marriage and having children ranked high, and were closely followed by getting a college education. The fact that white men had the highest educational attainment and were more likely to be employed in high status jobs might be indicative of the significance that obtaining a college education held for them. Although black men generally reported fewer critical events than the other race/sex groups, getting a job and military service were mentioned by about one-quarter of this group.

What Does the Future Hold?

In an attempt to add meaning and depth to the future educational, occupational, and residential plans of our study population and to help us understand what is important in achieving desirable adult roles, panel members were asked to comment on the following question: "During the next 10 years, what one thing would you most like to accomplish?" One of the most interesting findings revealed in Table 8 is that the responses given most frequently by black women dealt with education — more education for themselves, completion of a graduate or professional degree, or education for their children. These responses are consistent with previous findings that, even though black women had attained less formal education than the other groups, a significant percentage still expected to obtain a college degree. In fact, almost 40 percent of black women in our sample expected to continue their formal education. Perhaps more than the other groups, black women have experienced the barriers to upward social mobility that are fostered by limited education. Given this observation, it is not surprising that black women stress the importance of educational achievement for themselves and their children.

Table 8: Life goals for the next 10 years, by race and sex

Goal*	White men %	White women %	Black men %	Black women %
Strive for harmonious family life	9.7	13.3	13.3	9.1
Be successful in my job, business or profession	22.6	15.5	13.4	6.0
Have own business	11.3	6.7	3.3	9.1
Find a new or better career	8.1	0.0	10.0	6.1
Buy or own my own home	9.7	8.9	20.0	0.0
Complete graduate or professional degree or obtain additional formal education	6.4	20.0	6.6	39.4
Provide education for my children	0.0	2.2	0.0	12.1
Personal improvement	3.2	11.1	0.0	3.0

* These are the most frequently noted goals.

White men gave responses that centered on occupational goals — to have their own businesses or to be successful in their jobs. Given the relatively prestigious positions white men have already attained, it is not surprising that their goals for the future deal with occupational considerations. Other empirical findings presented in this study (e.g., delayed marriage, fewest marriages, fewest children desired, most education, and relatively prestigeful jobs) lend support to the notion that white men may be consciously limiting the factors that could delay or interfere with their goals of career development.

While black women were concerned with educational goals and white men dwelled on occupational goals, responses of black men centered more on family life. For example, among black men the most frequent goal was to own their own home. Interestingly, none of the black women in our sample listed home ownership as a life goal. Having a good family and being a good spouse were also highly rated goals. Being successful in the work world, another frequently mentioned goal, could also be interpreted as family oriented, since a stable job is often seen as a critical factor in achieving a harmonious family life.

Among white women, getting more formal education, being successful in their jobs, and striving for a happy family life emerged as most salient. The pattern of these responses suggests that the goals of white women in our study are not unlike those of many other contemporary American women. Being a good wife and mother while succeeding in the world of work are increasingly put forth as the characteristics modern women should strive for today.

Summary and Conclusions

The information we have collected over the past 14 years from a panel of young people who were reared in South Carolina in the 1950s and 1960s is beginning to provide important insights into what happens to individuals in the years following high school. Perhaps the most interesting finding from this overview of results is the high level of occupational and educational achievement displayed by the panel members. Taken together, the generation of young adults in our study have surpassed their parents' educational and occupational attainments. For example, about half of the young people we surveyed have either received or expect to receive a 4-year college degree and on average they currently hold jobs that are 10 to 30 points higher in prestige than their parents.

Another interesting finding is the sizeable percentage of the panel members who have remained in the state. Almost 80 percent of the white men and over 90 percent of the white women are pursuing their careers and raising their families in South Carolina. Although proportionately more blacks than whites have left the state (about 40 percent), the majority of the blacks in our panel have decided not to leave.

The data in Figure 2 and Table 6 also indicate that the high school class of 1969 is well on its way to settling down and raising a family. Interestingly, however, the number of children they expect is quite small. No doubt the uncertain economic times we live in and the new career options opening for women have served to temper the desire for large families.

When asked about the most critical events that shaped their lives since leaving high school, getting married and starting a family were deemed the most important events in the lives of the white respondents. Additionally, about one-quarter of the whites noted the importance of a college education. The blacks in our study, on the other hand, were most reserved in expressing their thoughts on the most important events that shaped their lives since high school. Getting married and having children were important events in the lives of about one-third of the black women and about 20 percent noted the importance of obtaining a college education. For black men, finding work and military service were noted most often.

When asked to articulate their future goals, almost 40 percent of the black women said that they wanted to obtain more formal education, while 20 percent of the black men wanted to own their own home. Being successful in their jobs was the principal goal of white men, while white women wanted to obtain more education and to be successful in their jobs.

Overall, the data in this bulletin indicate that the young people in our study have come a long way since we first interviewed them in 1967. As a group, their achievements and attainments when cast against their social origins are truly impressive, while their aspirations for the future indicate that they still see a world of challenge and opportunity ahead of them.

In the coming months, rural sociologists at Clemson University will begin analyzing, in greater detail, the data collected over the past 14 years. The findings derived from this research can be used by parents, teachers, and educational policymakers to better prepare future generations of South Carolina young people for meaningful adult roles.

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